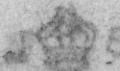


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A

Letter to a Friend,  
CONCERNING AN  
*Unlimited Toleration.*

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A  
LETTER  
FROM A  
**Country-Gentleman,**  
TO HIS  
**Friend in LONDON:**  
CONCERNING  
What a *King or Queen* may  
Lawfully and Justly do, to Preserve  
and Maintain the CHURCH,  
AGAINST  
Those that would Establish  
an *Unlimited Toleration.*

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LONDON:  
Printed for JOHN PEMBERTON, at the  
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Price 4 d.

A  
LETTER  
FROM A  
Comick-Geleman  
TO HIS  
Friend in London;  
CONCERNING  
What a King or Queen may  
do for the Benefit of  
the Poor.

London  
January the 20th, 1712.  
A Letter from a Comick-Geleman  
to his Friend in London;

Printed



A  
LETTER to a Friend,

CONCERNING

*An Unlimited Toleration.*

SIR, I beg your Pardon for this trouble, and

I Do not design here in its full Extent, to speak of the Rights of Princes about Matters of Religion ; because if I should undertake that Province with the Freedom and Exactness the Subject requires, I should trouble you with a large Volume instead of a Letter : But I am willing only to give you two or three Observations of my own, which I conceive very essential to lead you into a clear Light and Knowledge of it.

The 1<sup>st</sup> is, That in Matters of Religion, more than in any thing else, all Extremities ought to be avoided. If you will

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will but please to be at the trouble of reading what has been written there-upon, you will soon find, that when any one wants to make Choice of an Opinion, be the Subject-Matter what it will, he will, for the most part, take the *Medium*, without any farther Enquiry ; and it is the safest Way almost in every thing so to do.

*Popery* is utterly against Toleration : Those that are reckoned the Careless and Indifferent, or, if you please, *Latitudinarians*, would with all their Hearts have it to be Universal : And as for the Wise Men, that are for keeping a *Middle-Way* between them both, they would Tolerate a great deal, but not All.

There are some Authors, who have wrote on the Absolute Power of Sovereigns, and so have run all into Extremes. They have laid down Maxims fitter for making Tyrants, and flattering the Oppressors of Truth, and Breakers of Treaties, than for Defending and Maintaining them.

Others have carry'd things the quite contrary way : They would have Princes not to meddle at all in Matters of Religion, but would leave every Body to their own particular Genius and Humour ; and possibly they would go so far as to tolerate even

ven the *Turkish* and *Heathenish* Missionaries, and suffer them to preach, and corrupt Souls, and even to grant them publick Places of Worship ; or at least, permit them a free Exercise of Religion in their own Private Houses. They think that Princes ought not to take upon them to reform the Abuses and Tenents of their Subjects, but rather to let every Body Preach and Believe as they please, and in their own Way.

In short, That the Prince's Authority ought by no Means to extend to any of those things ; but only to endeavour to make every Body live as peaceably and easily as he can, with one another.

I must also advise you, in the second Place, that this last Extreme is beyond Comparison much more Culpable than the other, and seems to reach even to Madness it self : For what can be more remote from Wisdom and good Sense, than this Extravagant Opinion ? Every one, you know, in his Station, is obliged to do all he can to promote the Glory of God, to establish Truth, and destroy *whoever loveth, and maketh a Lye* ; to preserve Purity in Religion, and endeavour to restore it, when it is lost : And shall the Prince alone be excluded from so necessary and indispensable a Duty ?

Farther ;

Farther ; Every one is obliged to serve herein, according to that Character where-with God has endowed him. The Learned Man ought to contribute what he can to it with his Learning ; the Wise Man with his Wisdom ; the Eloquent Man with his Eloquence ; and the Rich Man with his Wealth and Abundance. And shall the Prince only be deprived of Exercising his Authority in this Matter, which is his proper Character, and what is peculiarly due to him ? Why then should this Authority be thus rejected ? How comes it to pass, that all the Characters, which are in the several other Offices of Human Life, should enter into the Designs of God for Establishing and Maintaining his Truth ; and that the Regal Authority alone should be exempted from it ?

Certainly no Reason can be given to justify this wonderful Maxim, nor any Instance shewn in History for it.

But, on the contrary, we find in the Sacred Scriptures, that God commanded Princes, who are his *Vicegerents*, to keep and preserve the Purity of Religion by their own Authority ; nay, even so far as *Capitally* to punish those that should corrupt his Worship.

We

We read there, how that from time to time God raised up Judges (that is to say, Sovereign Magistrates) among the People of *Israel*, who made use of their Authority for the Banishing of all Kinds of False Worship, as well as those that had introduced them.

*David* concern'd himself so much in the Business of Religion, that we may indeed say, he put his last Hand to, and finished the Ecclesiastical Government, and Discipline of the Antient Church, by settling the different Orders of Priests for Sacrifices, *Levites*, Door-Keepers, &c.

*Solomon*, after he had built a most Magnificent Temple for the Service of God, undertook also himself to Consecrate and Dedicate it by a most Excellent Prayer; which was the Office <sup>1 Kings 8.</sup> of an Ecclesiastick.

And so the Kings *Aza*, *Hezekiah*, and *Josiah*, made use of their particular Authority in restoring the Purity of the Divine Worship, which had been almost destroy'd by their Predecessors.

And I cannot imagine there have been any Fanaticks so far disturbed in their Heads, as ever to think them to blame for their so doing.

If Princes ought not to employ their Authority, for bringing their Subjects back again to their Duty, and the true Worship of their Holy Religion, when it had been corrupted thro' the Abuses made by the Authority of another ill Prince, the true Religion would be quite lost for ever, and that without Remedy.

For his Successor cannot make use of any kind of Authority to recover those who have Erred by Authority. All that remains for him to do, is, To make Choice of good Preachers, who shall represent to those that are in Error, that they are out of the Right Way ; that they are become Idolaters ; that they cannot serve two Masters ; that God requires their whole Heart, and will be served only in Spirit and in Truth, with Purity and Simplicity.

But they must not meddle with their Churches, nor take away their Altars, or their Idols : Only tell them, *Serve them,*

*if*

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*if you will, but he will take it ill of you ;  
but if you will abandon them, you shall be  
kindly receiv'd by him.*

Now it seems to me, that God may with great Right and Justice make use of the same Means for Establishing his Kingdom, that Falshood usurps for Establishing her own ; provided those Means are not Evil in themselves.

And I never heard it yet said, that Authority, and the making use of it, is Evil in it self. And if so, let us consider,

The Devil makes use of Eloquence, Science, and Persuasion, for the Establishing of his Falshood ; and shall not God make use of the same Means for Establishing his Truth ? Again,

The Devil makes use of Promises, Threatnings, Fear and Hope ; and God takes the same Method.

The Devil makes use of Fraud, Violence, Murther, &c. But God does not take these Courses, because these are Evil in themselves.

*A Letter concerning*

But I can see no reason, why the Devil should make use of an Authority, which is good in it self, or at least indifferent ; and that God should be debarr'd from making a good use of it, for Establishing and Maintaining his True Religion, by Persons whom he hath appointed to Govern the People committed to their Charge.

Can any body deny, that *Paganism* was rooted out of the World by the Influence and Authority of the *Roman Emperors* ? And may we not as confidently affirm, without being thought Fool-hardy, that *Heathenism* would have yet continued in it, and Three Parts in Four of *Europe* have been still Heathens, if *Constantine* and his Successors had not made use of their Authority, for the suppressing and destroying of them ?

But, pray, what Ways hath God made use of in these last Ages, for Re-establishing the True Religion in the *West* ? The Kings of *Sueden*, *Denmark*, and *England*, the Sovereign Magistrates in *Switzerland*, the *Low-Countries* ( or *Holland* ) the *Hans*, or Free-Towns in *Germany*, the Electors, and other Princes of the Empire ; have they

*an Unlimited Toleration.* 9

they not all exerted their Authority for the pulling down the Strong-Holds of Property ?

But these People have a great Mind to reduce us to a very strange Condition. The *Popish* Writers, to convince us, if they were able, that our *Reformation* was a down-right *Schism*, say, That it was begun in a Tumultuous Manner, and made without any Order in the World ; That two or three Peevish Hot-headed *Monks* stirred up the People, and so by their own Authority they withdrew from the *Romish* Church.

To this we Answer, That the Fact is not true ; and we object to them, That in *England*, *Scotland*, *Switzerland*, *Geneva*, and every where else, it was done by the Supreme Civil Authority, that ordered divers Learned Persons to look into, and thoroughly to Examine the Grounds of the *Christian* Religion, and to alter the Manner of Worship, and restore the Purity of its Service with Decency and Good Order.

If we should believe what our Enemies alledge, all that we do makes against us : For they tell us, that the Prince's Authority

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rity was got by Usurpation ; and that is it which makes the *Reformation* faulty and vicious.

We are very rash indeed, in condemning the Ways which the Divine Providence hath constantly made use of, for Settling the True Religion : But still we must always except the first Establishment of *Christianity*, and its Preservation ; wherein God was willing at that time, (to carry on his own most Holy Purposes, and Gracious Ends) to admit some visible and sensible Miracles : Therefore he would not suffer any Human Authority to be concern'd in it.

But excepting this Place in the History of the Church, we see constantly, I say, every-where, that God admits the Authority of the Supreme Power to establish and maintain the True Religion, and to destroy that which is False.

The *Third Advice* I would beg leave to give you, is, To take care that you be not caught by the Cheat of Interest, which has been the great Cause of all those strange Alterations in the Doctrine of the Church. When the *Christians* had not the Authority  
in

in their own Hands, but it was all directly against them; they then cry'd out grievously that Consciences were not to be forced, but only persuaded, won and reduced by the Power of Truth. They complained of *Persecution*, not only for the severe and unjust Punishments they suffer'd, but also because they were deprived of their Churches, and forbid their assembling themselves together in them: But when that Authority proved to be on their Side, they made their best Advantages of it. We don't see any where that the Fathers cry'd out against those Emperors, who forbade the Worshipping of Idols, caused their Temples to be destroyed, and put an End to their Superstitious Fooleries.

I am mightily afraid, Sir, that a present Interest should carry you thus into a Mistake; because that Interest is present and pressing. We should have extreamly rejoiced, if the *French* Court would have been persuaded of the Truth of this Maxim, That it was a Diabolical thing to exert their Authority in Matters of Religion, but that every body ought to be left to the Freedom of their own Consciences.

If

If such a Maxim should obtain there at this Time of Day, it would be very Joyful News to a great many poor Suffering People: But it is much to be feared, that for the small Profit which might be reaped from it, the Church would run the hazard of suffering very extreamly thereby, and we possibly might be brought to retract all we have said of this matter some years hence. For if the Kings of *France* and *Spain* should come to make use of their Authority to Banish the *Popish Religion* out of their Dominions, as the Kings of *England* and *Sueden* have done, we should be so far from blaming them, or from disliking their Proceedings, that we should highly applaud them, and bless God for their so doing.

I am sure this must happen one time or other; For the Holy Ghost has *Apocalypse,* *ch. 17. v. 12,* *16.* said himself, *That the Kings of the Earth, who have given Power to the Beast, shall take it from her, and strip her naked, and eat her Flesh.*

It was by the Authority of the *Western Kings* that the Empire of Popery was set up; and the same Authority will one time or

or other pull it down again: And this will be entirely conformable to the Design and Will of God, and therefore we shall have no reason to dislike it. Now that we may be always uniform in our Sentiments, let us be always found in the Truth which never changes; and not regulate our Sentiments according to those Interests which are changing every Day.

I These Reflections are sufficient for my Design, which is to make you sensible, that there never was any Maxim less agreeable to good Sense, than this, viz. "That the Prince's Authority ought never to be made use of about the Means which are instrumental in Establishing or Maintaining the True Religion.

I might here, if I would, prove to you, That Christian and Orthodox Princes have now almost every - where the Supreme Power in Spirituals as well as in Temporals, and that they are the Real Protectors of the Church.

But taking these things for granted, as they are Matters of Fact, and consequently most certain, That Princes may make use of their Authority for suppressing Idolatry,

Superstition and Heresy : Yet I would give you another *Fourth Advice*, that so you may not deceive your self about the Measure of their Authority, and what they may lawfully use in Matters of Religion; because there are certain Bounds to be put to it.

As for Instance ; Authority cannot kill, nor force a Man believingly to worship against his Conscience ; nor say to him, I command you immediately to adore *Jesus Christ*, and believe the Tenents of the *Christian Religion*, or else you shall Die. I command you presently to go to *Mass*, to renounce your Religion, or you shall be plundered, and ruined by *Dragoons* ; you shall be harassed and tormented Night and Day, till you have *Abjured*.

In such Cases, this Maxim must prevail, *That Religion is to be won by Persuasion, but not by Force.*

This Latter is only the way to make Men *Hypocrites*, and to Profane the very Mysteries of Religion it self. 'Tis to overthrow the Laws, both Human and Divine. In this Respect, the Authors who have wrote upon that Subject, are

in the Right : And it is so plain a Truth in it self, and so well approved of at this Day, that one must be Steel'd with a Seard Conscience, not to be sensible of it. God himself never made use of such Means as these, for establishing Christianity, or setting up the Reformation.

If some Emperors have exceeded their own Laws on this Account ; If in these last Times some *Reformed States* have made too severe Regulations, this is purely Human ; it has been extorted from them by some rash, bigotted, and fiery Zealots of the Church, and, in short, was only an Effect of Human Policy : But no Body can say that these were the Methods, which God took in the setting up of his Religion ; for such were never practised. Those rigorous Laws were nothing else, but Phantoms to frighten People out of their Reason, and indeed, out of their Religion too.

We don't read any where, that the Christian Emperors ever punished any Heathens for refusing to acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Redeemer and Saviour, and to participate of his Sacred Mysteries ; nor do I believe that there

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ever was any Example of *Heathens* being Punished purely upon the Account of having Sacrificed to their Idols ; tho' this latter Severity was not by far so detestable as the former : And if any such were found, it must be in the corrupt Ages of the Church since the *Eighth Century* ; viz. When the true Maxims of *Christianity* were almost quite abolished and lost.

But alas ! What signifies Authority against any Religion that is false ? We need only to consult the History of the Church, without ever making use of our Reason, to have a sufficient Idea and Knowledge of it.

Let us see then, what those Princes have done, who received their Authority from God, and were approved of by the whole Church. The Kings of *Israel*, that they might effectually purge and cleanse the

Numb. 33. 52.  
Exod. 34. 13. Church, destroyed *Molten Images*, cut down the *Groves*, demolish'd all the *High Places*, interdicted Sacrificing to Idols, and drove out the Strangers from thence, who had seduced the Land by their Abominations.

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The *Christian* Emperors following their Example, and making use of their Authority, did the like to the *Heathens*, by pulling down their Temples, burning their Pictures and Images, prohibiting the Worship of their strange Gods, and putting Ministers of the Gospel into the Places of their False Prophets and Doctors ; and suppressing all their Books, they caused them to Preach true and wholsome Doctrine to them.

They abolished *Arrianism*, by depriving the *Arrians* of their Churches, (which they had before usurped from the *Orthodox*) and by turning out their false Bishops, and substituting others in their room, that were good, and stedfast in the Faith.

The *Reformed* Princes got *Popery* rooted out of their Dominions, by taking from the Priests their Pulpits, and putting into them such Men as were sound in their Doctrine, pure in their Morals, and exemplary in their Lives ; by burning their Images, and causing their Relicks to be buried under Ground, and by their prohibiting all manner of Idolatrous Worship. So far have they been in these things from acting contrary

*A Letter concerning*  
contrary to the Divine Law, that they have  
entirely obey'd its Rules and Orders.

For it is the Will of God, " That the  
" Kings of the Earth should strip the  
" Beast, and break down his Image." No  
good *Protestant* has ever deny'd it to this  
Day, nor will ever any Man of Sense con-  
ceive otherwise. These things have been  
always so, and by God's Grace will always  
thus be, maugre all the Endeavours of  
Libertines, and wicked Men to the con-  
trary.

But they will say perhaps, that hereby  
you give a Power and Right to *Heretical*  
and *Popish* Princes to persecute the *True*  
*Church*, or at least that they may do it :  
And if they proceed no farther than to  
take away your Churches, forbid all Pub-  
lick Service, and banish your Ministers,  
there will be no great Occasion of Com-  
plaining. This is what these Gentlemen  
do say, and repeat over and over to you  
every Day, and insist upon it, and will  
hearken to no manner of Reason you can  
offer against them : Therefore all those  
who are not of their Opinion, are by them  
accounted but as meer Animals. But they  
will give me leave, I hope, to return them  
the

the same Compliment, and to tell them, that their Blindness is too great for me to comprehend.

For this Objection is very trifling and unbecoming Men of Parts, and even almost beyond Imagination, as I will shew you instantly. Because a King hath a Right to punish Malefactors; has therefore a Tyrant a Right to inflict the same Punishment on the Innocent? Because a Prince may possibly have a Right to raise some reasonable Tributes for the Support of his (I don't say this) Government; Must such a one therefore have a Right to levy what Sums he pleases upon his People by exorbitant Taxes and open Plunders? Because some People have a Right to deny paying Obedience to a Tyrant, Have they therefore a Right to refuse obeying Princes in their just and lawful Commands? Because a Prince has a Right to promote the Truth, and to defend and protect it, Has he therefore a Right to establish Heresy and Idolatry by a Law?

In short; Because a Prince has a Right to serve God by his Authority, Has he therefore any Right to make use of the same Authority for the Devil's Service?

These

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These are, I say, such monstrous Absurdities, (not to call them Infatuations) that they have something in them of Prodigy; and are such Extravagancies, that scarce belong to Human Nature to conceive.

In a word then; We must recur to this most certain and most evident Maxim of St. Paul, *That we can do nothing against the Truth, but for the Truth.* There is no Right, where there is no Justice nor Truth. For it is Justice and Truth, that give the Right.

Now, I have proved this Maxim, tho' I don't believe it stood in any need of Proof; for it carries Self-Conviction along with it, and is the Evidence of the first Principles of Morality, such as Rom. 13. 7. *these, That we must render to every one their due, &c.*

But our Adversaries go farther, and say, That a King, be he an Idolater, a Papist, a Heathen, or what he will, believes that he has the Truth on his side, and consequently that he has a Right to do for his Imputative Truth, what the Orthodox Princes

Princes do for theirs, which they know to be absolute Truth. And here lies the grand Illusion, which has been often contested, and I dare say almost as often baffled and refuted; That an Erroneous Conscience has the same Privileges as one that is Orthodox.

Now this is very absurd, as I shall make appear by this plain Instance; That a King, because he shall fancy that a Robber (but of a Farthing) deserves Death, as much as if he had stolen a Hundred Thousand Pounds; He therefore should be in the Right in snatching a Child from his Mother, and condemn him to be hang'd, because he had Robb'd her of a few Farthings; and that he had acquired by this his conceited head-strong Opinion, a Right to burn those, who should Marry a Second Wife, because a Second Marriage, in his deluded Imagination, is a kind of Incest and Sodomy. At this rate, none but those whose Minds are captivated to the last degree, can say, that an Idolatrous Prince hath the same Right to establish Idolatry, as an Orthodox Prince hath to maintain the True and Apostolical Religion.

One of these Authors above-mentioned shamefully makes use of a certain *Popish* Writer, who affirms, That *Protestants* have no Authority to use the *Romish* Church after the same Manner as She uses them ; because that Church is the Mother, and *Protestants* are but her Rebellious Children. But the Folly and Jest of it has never carry'd them so far, as to maintain, that Revolted Children have the same Right over their Father, as the Father has over them.

Whether this Author has not well digest'd his System ; or that he had a Mind at first to conceal himself ; or rather (and what seems more probable) that the Strength of Truth prevailed over his Prejudices, thought it better to turn his Argument into Ridicule : For he adds, that the Reason of this, is, Because there is nothing more ridiculous, than to argue by Supposing what is indeed the Point in Question.

Now this Argument takes it for granted, that the *Romish* Church is the Mother, and We the *Protestants* are her Rebellious Children. And here lies the Fallacy : But it is not

ex-

explained by this Maxim, that the Mother has any Rights, which those She calls her Revolted Children have not ; tho' these same Children should be in an Error, and yet believe themselves very well grounded in their Opinion.

He then, that is in the wrong in his Supposition, cannot have any Right in its Consequences. The *Idolatrous* Prince is in the *Wrong*, in supposing that the *Reformed Religion* is an *Heresy* ; and therefore he can have no *Right* to do any thing against the *Reformed Religion*.

If these Gentlemen would but please to consider things a little more sedately, they would soon find their Delusion to proceed only from the Depravity of their Judgment, and the Falseness of their Measures. The Mistake of one small Word for another, frequently deceives them, and puts them quite beside the Cushion. If they should put the Word *Occasion*, for Instance, in the room of that of *Right* in their Objection, they will seem to be in the Right. I confess it is true, that if we should affirm, That *Orthodox* Princes may exercise their Authority in suppressing any false Religion ; we may seem to give *Occasion*, or

Handle to *Hereticks*, and Princes that worship Idols, to persecute the *True Church*; yet however, it will not from thence follow (nor is it true) that we give them a *Right* to do so.

We may seem to give them an *Occasion* to do it, because they don't fail to tell us so: Since they are the *Rights* of *Truth*, I, who am in the Truth, ought to improve it the best I can. But suppose it were true, what is then to be done in such a Case? Is it not an Evil without a *Remedy*? 'Tis a Misfortune that proceeds from the Truth, but that is *Accidentally*. Do whatever you can think of, enlarge as much as you please, or lessen and dispense with the *Rights* of the True Religion; yet that which is false will always usurp them, under the Pretence, that it is the True Religion. And because of this, must we never speak of the *Rights* of the True Religion, and of its Privileges?

After all that is to be said, the *Occasion* which they pretend we give to those that persecute, is very frivolous and trifling. First, because it is not that which formerly inspired the House of *Austria*, and now at this Day does inspire the *French Court*, with

with a Design to persecute *Protestants*. In the Second Place, because Persecutors exceed the Limits permitted by us who profess the True Religion: They Burn, they Hang, they Compel, &c. which we are not suffered to do. Thirdly, Because neither do we allow, that the Truth has any *Right* to break Treaties, or violate the Faith that is given to *Hereticks*. And Lastly, because the Mischief, which would redound to the Church by this Maxim, (if it were established) *That Princes ought never to make use of their Authority in Matters of Religion*, would be a thousand times worse, than the Sufferings and Miseries it now lies under. For *Popery* will never be destroy'd, but by the Authority of those Princes who have set it up, and established it; and *Paganism*, as I have said already, would be still in Being and Reigning, under the Umbrage of this false Maxim.

Let us say then, if you please, that we do not give *Occasion* to Persecutors to do what they do; but rather that we furnish them with a specious Excuse and Pretence for so doing. Yet this is, in my humble Opinion, but a small Evil, in comparison of the Good which may be reaped from Truth.

I will

I will not now enlarge any farther upon this Subject; For I am fully persuaded, that those Gentlemen of Wit who will not submit to these Arguments, will never become Converts by greater Volumes.

*I am,*

**S I R,**

*Tours, &c.*

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